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SENATOR CARDIN ANNOUNCES “SPICER TRACT” ACQUISITION FOR BLACKWATER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

CAMBRIDGE, MD -- **U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin** (D-MD) today announced a major expansion of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge with the purchase of the 766-acre Spicer Tract on the eastern portion of the Refuge. Blackwater NWR, located in Dorchester County, is one of our nation’s premier wildlife refuges, consisting of 27,000 acres that include one-third of Maryland’s tidal wetlands and some of the most ecologically important areas of our State.

The Refuge is currently separated into two non-contiguous sections by land that is unprotected from development, deforestation and other potential land-use conversions. Since 2008, **Senators Cardin and Barbara A. Mikulski** along with **Congressman Frank Kratovil** (all D-MD) have worked to appropriate \$3.4 million for land acquisition at Blackwater NWR. Acting within the boundaries of its master plan, The Refuge is authorized to purchase environmentally important parcels from willing land owners. The Fish and Wildlife Service is using \$2.4 million of the special congressional funds to purchase the Spicer Tract.

*“The Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge is often referred to as the ‘Everglades of the North,’ and one of my top priorities is to preserve and protect its unique ecological and wildlife habitat,” said **Senator Cardin**, a member of the Environment and Public Works Committee. “The Refuge has become a tourist destination and -- along with the Harriet Tubman Historic Landscape – is providing a positive economic impact of approximately \$27.7 million to the economy of Dorchester County, creating jobs for residents and attracting tourists to the heart of Chesapeake country.”*

Senator Cardin has been a long-time supporter of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and the Harriet Tubman project. Tubman, the heroic woman who escaped from slavery and led hundreds to freedom on the Underground Railroad, was born within the master plan boundary of the Refuge. She spent her early life as a slave in the Refuge area and many of the history sites associated with her life of located in or near the Refuge.

Last year, Senator Cardin introduced *The Harriet Tubman National Historical Park* and *The Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park Act* along with **Senators Barbara A. Mikulski** (D-MD), **Senators Charles Schumer** and **Kirsten E. Gillibrand** (both D-NY). **Congressman Kratovil** is co-sponsor of identical legislation in the House of Representatives. The legislation would establish two parks, one in Maryland adjacent to the Blackwater Refuge, and one in New York, to honor the legacy of Harriet Tubman.

"We are pleased that the Spicer family was willing work with The Conservation Fund and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect and conserve these important wildlife habitats for future generations," said **Suzanne Baird**, Refuge Manager.

The Conservation Fund, a national conservation organization, secured the 766-acre parcel from the Spicer family when it became available last year. The Fund, which combines real estate and environmental expertise, works with private landowners who are interested in selling their properties. After negotiations conclude, which can sometimes take years, the Fund then sells the parcel to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for permanent protection. The Conservation Fund used a similar approach in purchasing and then selling to Maryland the nearby land that will be home to the Harriet Tubman Visitors Center.

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